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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1129
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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SUBJECT: TIM SWEEPS MADAGASCAR'S "REGIONAL COUNSELOR" ELECTIONS

REFTEL: ANTANANARIVO 198

¶1. (U) Unofficial results from Madagascar's first-ever elections for regional counselors on March 16 show the ruling TIM party won almost all of the 147 seats throughout the country. In a number of regions, only TIM candidates ran. Results are still being counted, but the average participation rate was pegged around 44 percent. This is a fairly impressive national average, given the main themes surrounding these elections have been voter fatigue and low turnout. Many citizens complained they did not understand the role of the new position of regional counselor, and thus did not make the effort to go to the polls.

¶2. (U) The Consortium of National Election Observers (CNOE), which recently benefited from a Department-funded capacity building program implemented by the National Democratic Institute, deployed election observers throughout 16 of the country's 22 regions. In a press conference, CNOE noted elections proceeded calmly, but overall voter turnout was weak and the allocation of funds throughout the electoral process was less than transparent. CNOE observers noticed voter turnout was higher in regions with multiple candidates and lower in regions with only TIM candidates. Some fokontany (local) chiefs in the latter areas reportedly received pressure from government-appointed regional chiefs to encourage high voter turnout; the implicit message was they would be rewarded or punished accordingly.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: President Ravalomanana publicly tried to encourage voter participation by noting this first election for regional counselors "will go down in history." However, we frankly share the public puzzlement regarding the significance of the regional counselors, and so far this election seems fairly unremarkable. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT